



For Immediate Release
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Media Advisory

EPA Scientific Symposium to Provide Updates on Status and Trends of Ecosystems in Western United States

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Research Triangle Park, NC.....A symposium, sponsored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, will be held April 6-8 in San Francisco as part of a major EPA initiative to develop new and innovative approaches to monitoring the health of ecosystems in the Western United States. The symposium entitled, **"The Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Program Symposium on Western Ecological Systems: Status, Issues and New Approaches,"** will be held at the Holiday Inn at Fisherman's Wharf.

At the symposium, the EPA's Office of Research and Development will announce a new 12-state research initiative called the Western Environmental Management and Assessment Program (WEMAP) that will begin this year. The planned, five-year study is designed to provide a report card on the health of ecological systems in the Western United States and will be the largest comprehensive study of the ecological conditions in the West by the EPA. It will involve partnerships with local communities, tribal representatives, universities, other governmental agencies and EPA regulatory offices in the states. The cooperative study will be conducted in California, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Arizona, Nevada, Oregon, Idaho and Washington.

In the first year of WEMAP, estuaries, rivers and streams will be monitored to determine their current conditions and whether pollution or other stressors in the environment are associated with declines in ecological health. In following years, monitoring and assessment research activities are planned to study the conditions of forests, deserts, mountains and the Great Plains. Additionally, over a five-year period, the project will evaluate landscape conditions relative to aquatic resources over the entire study area.

"This research initiative is an effort to coordinate monitoring activities and develop uniform tools that can be used by states to evaluate the health status of ecosystems and protect vulnerable ecosystems using the most cost-effective approaches," said Dr. Gilman Veith, Associate Director for Ecology at the EPA National Health and Environmental Effects Research Laboratory that is leading the study. "The symposium is providing a forum to begin this important work," he said.

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An overview of EPA's ecological monitoring and assessment program will be presented by Dr. Michael McDonald, director of EPA's Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Program (EMAP), on April 6.

At the scientific gathering, environmental scientists and managers from Western states will present the latest in ecological research to monitor and assess the condition of the environment. Those participating include leading ecological experts, state environmental officials, community-based environmental groups and others involved in environmental monitoring and assessment. Speakers at the symposium include:

- Dr. Sylvia A. Earle, an internationally renowned oceanographer and former chief scientist of the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration, who is conducting a five-year Sustainable Seas Expedition, sponsored by the National Geographic Society and funded by the Goldman Foundation. She will talk at 8 p.m. during the banquet on April 7.
- Dr. Deborah Jensen, vice president and director of the Conservation Science Division, Nature Conservancy, Arlington, VA, will talk on "Saving the Best of the West: Designing and Conserving Networks of Conservation Areas" at 11 a.m. on April 6.
- Dr. Mark Schaefer, deputy assistant secretary for Water and Science, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C., will talk on "Sustainable Ecosystems in the West" at 11:30 a.m. on April 6.
- Dr. Bruce Thompson, San Francisco Estuary Institute, Richmond, Calif., will talk on "Regional Monitoring in the San Francisco Estuary: Synthesis and Key Issues" at 10:30 a.m. on April 7.

Other presentations include research to monitor the restoration efforts of salmon in Oregon; status of monitoring the quality of marine environments in Alaska; near-border chemical monitoring of Mexican sediments; monitoring of forest health; monitoring plant diversity and exotic species in the Western United States and assessments of amphibian biodiversity in arid environments.

For a symposium agenda or additional information, visit the EMAP Symposium website: <http://www.epa.gov/emap>. Reporters who want to attend must register by contacting Ann Brown, EPA Office of Research and Development Public Affairs, 919-541-7818. For other registration information, contact 781-544-3063.